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ABSTRACT

In recent years the American higher education enterprise has made a dramatic effort to attract the adult student. This effort has largely been based on economic necessity, since the numbers of traditionally aged college students (18-22) have fallen. Extension and continuing education for adult students is not completely new to higher education, having been introduced in this country in the 1870s by England's Cambridge University, although in recent years many institutions are becoming involved for the first time. In most instances, extension and continuing education have been less than full partners in the university community. The recent emphasis on the parttime adult student tends to suggest that continuing education is closer to reaching its potential than ever before. However, complete fruition is not yet in sight. Therefore, it is imperative that continuing education personnel continue to push for total university support of their program in order to maximize benefits for their constituents and themselves. (KC)

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EXTENSION AND CONTINUING EDUCATION: A REVITALIZED
DIMENSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION?

The Issues

Not since the enactment of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, which created the Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service, has the American higher education enterprise made such a dramatic effort to attract the adult student.¹ From New England to the West Coast, colleges and universities are conceptualizing and conducting thousands of extension and continuing education courses, workshops, conferences and innovative projects. These activities are geared to lure the adult part-time student.²

In not a few instances, extension and continuing education has moved from the grubbiest quarters to some of the most attractive facilities. These centers often become the campus show place. They are particularly impressive to continuing education clients and other officials and potential contributors.³

The palpable reasons for the increase in continuing education is the retrenchment of the traditional full-time student population and the wide-spread austerity in higher education. As Houle points out, "Many institutions are presently faced with one or more of several fates: Death, amputation, shrinkage, or the abandonment of the belief that they can maintain excellence in all departments of instruction."⁴ John Silber, President of Boston University, concurs. He believes that, "Independent universities are

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an endangered species."⁵ An alarming 113 colleges campuses closed between 1970 and 1976.⁶

Aggressive extension and continuing education efforts are put forth to generate both new clients and financial resources.⁷ The adult students and state legislators are staunch supporters of this new phenomenon. The legislature has mandated relicensure in many of the professions. These officials are encouraged to see institutions of higher education heavily engaged in assisting professionals in accomplishing their educational goals. More than 17 million adults aged 25 and over participate in continuing education courses annually. Part-time students currently outnumber full-time student enrollments.⁸

Conversely, many educators are leery of the upsurge and charge that this new curriculum emphasis is superficial, temporary, and is strictly financially motivated. Still others make more serious charges. They argue that the program: (1) lacks credibility, (2) is poorly structured, administratively, and (3) is void of full university commitment.⁹

Credibility

Since the concept of extension education was introduced into this country in the 1870's by Cambridge University in England, its place in the college structure has consistently faced uncertainty. College curricula have historically been designed for the full-time student between the ages of

17 and 22. Extension education was an add-on, a stepchild, and the first program to be cut.¹⁰

Throughout the years "academicians" avoided becoming involved with the campus extension and continuing education unit. It was considered an academic "sideline" and a sure means of forfeiting academic promotion. Lincoln and Guba maintain that "Promotion and tenure criteria include evidence of quality instruction and evidence of service but rest more heavily on classical research and scholarly activity."¹²

The extension program still does not carry status equal to that of other academic units. Emphasis on research and scholarly activity will, no doubt, increase, particularly in view of budget restrictions and "the desire of administrators to avoid further fiscal commitments through promotion and tenure decisions."¹³

Spear summarized the plight of extension and continuing education during past years:

It experienced poor relationship with academic units. It was cast in the role of arranger, and beggar of crumbs. It was given low academic status, and concerned itself with teaching non-subsidized adults at off-campus locations. It was preoccupied with operating gimmicky dog-and pony shows, and slowly strangled with loss of federal support for social action programs.¹⁴

Even in the face of severe enrollment decline, financial exigency, and the potential for continuing education to become a center of power and income, only grudgingly are academic units becoming involved in

extension work. According to Stephen Horn, President of California State at Long Beach, faculty would rather teach two residential courses a semester and produce doctorates in esoteric fields.¹⁵

Although credibility has improved somewhat in the last few years, disparity in administrative and faculty support still exists between university extension and academic programs. This condition continues to cause considerable concern among extensionists and their allies.

Organizational Structure

Perhaps the greatest inconsistency in extension and continuing education programs in higher education is in their organizational structures. There are nearly as many organizational paradigms as there are institutions involved in continuing education. These variances seem to be dictated by several factors including institutional size, location (urban or rural), and institutional type (public or private).

The financing of extension and continuing education programs differ widely among universities. Most have small budget allocations and are expected to generate large sums for the institution. At many of the major universities, continuing education is a big business with budgets that extend into the \$ millions.

There is little evidence that improvements have been made in the administrative structure of extension education

since its introduction into this country in the 1800's,
according to Ratchford:

There has never been a common pattern of organization or mission for university continuing education... Continuing education programs were started from sources varying from the top administration to a single faculty member and to achieve widely varying objectives. Generalized outcomes of the development in this manner were that before the program was launched the following were not decided: The financial base, mission policies to direct the program, and the power and status of the leader within the university¹⁶ hierarchy. The initial wide variation still exists.

Among the multiplicity of operational variations, there are generally three basic models employed to implement continuing education programs:

Centralized Model: All continuing education programs emanate from a central, autonomous continuing education unit. Generally, the continuing education unit will have its own program development, instructional and evaluation staffs. ~~From~~ this unit offers its own degrees with little or no relationship to campus degrees or campus faculty.

Decentralized Model: All continuing education programs emanate from the academic units of the institution without reference to a continuing education unit. Total responsibility for program development and delivery is vested in the dean of the academic unit.

Cooperative Model: Responsibility for program identification and development is shared jointly by the academic college and the College of Continuing Education. Academic responsibility is vested primarily in the academic college, while administration and fiscal management is vested primarily in the College of Continuing Education. The Dean of Continuing Education has leadership responsibility for the total continuing education efforts of the campus.¹⁷

Continuing education continues to encounter difficulty in its plight to receive full acceptance within the academic community. Much of the frustration is attributed to the

lack of a sound organizational structure.

Commitment

Perhaps the most essential element needed in the effectuation of a topflight extension and continuing education program is high level commitment of the entire university to this cause. More often than not, institutional support of a program can be determined by that program's productivity.

Historically, institutions of higher education that provided any form of education for the part-time adult student did it on a limited basis. Administrators made certain that the student population over age 25 was kept out of sight, lest they interfere with operations for the regular students.¹⁸

Presently, nearly all institutions (public, private, two-year, four-year, urban and rural) are in some way engaged in extension and continuing education. Fischer points out that, "In one state, the number of institutions that provided programs of continuing education just a few years ago was in the teens. Today more than 150 institutions are active."¹⁹ Most consider it fashionable as well as economically astute to direct much of their attention to the adult student population.

On the other hand, however, critics of the adult education movement in higher education sum up their feelings

this way. "Implementation of adult programs?" "Yes."

"University commitment to adult programs?" "No."

Rathford admonishes that the need for introspection by university administrators concerning their commitment to continuing education is at hand:

...An effective continuing education program requires unreserved commitment by the total university--faculty administrators at all levels, and the governing board ...It means giving continuing education the same importance and status as resident teaching and research ...It means that those involved in continuing education be considered as first class citizens and enjoy the same opportunity for academic rewards and financial returns as other faculty...It means budget allocations of "hard" university dollars...It means giving equal value to courses offered on and off campus...It means the development of a long-range plan for continuing education...It means the establishment of an appropriate organizational and administrative structure for continuing education.²⁰

Those who are the least bit familiar with extension and continuing education in higher education are cognizant that the levels of commitment identified by Rathford are far from a reality on most campuses. Decades may pass before universities become fully committed to the adult student, if ever.

Summary

Extension and continuing education is not completely new to higher education, although in recent years many institutions are becoming involved for the first time. In most instances it has been less than a full partner in the university community.

The recent emphasis on the part-time adult student tends to suggest that continuing education is closer to reaching its potential than ever before. However, complete fruition is not yet in sight. Therefore, it is imperative that continuing education personnel continue to push for total university support of their program in order to maximize benefits for their constituents and themselves.

FOOTNOTES

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